

Lobbying from non-state actors is part and parcel of the EU's foreign policy making process.

by Blog Admin

What role do lobbyists play in shaping the EU's external relations? Using the Israel-Palestine conflict as a case study, [Benedetta Voltolini](#) investigates the role of non-state actors in providing information, raising awareness and shaping the EU's policies in the region.

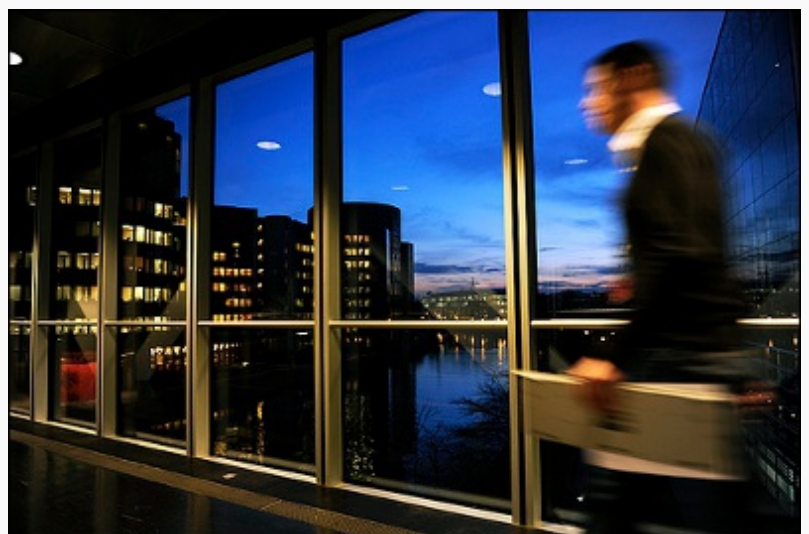


Discussions about lobbying in the EU are not new, but recent events have made it a topic of particular importance. Last year the Commission and the European Parliament [launched](#) a joint transparency register for interest representatives, following the lobbying scandal of some MEPs accepting money to [table](#) certain amendments on EU legislation on banking regulation. Recently, Maltese Commissioner John Dalli had to [resign](#) due to his alleged involvement in a case of lobbying by the tobacco industry. The topic has even reached the movie world last spring, with a film entitled 'The Brussels Business: Lobbying the European Union', showing the phenomenon of interest groups' lobbying on EU policies. Scholars have also been dealing with non-state actors (NSAs), such as business groups, NGOs, think tanks etc., and their lobbying and advocacy activities. In particular, they have focused on a variety of issues such as interest groups' influence, civil society participation and EU democratic deficit or the Europeanisation of interest groups' strategies or national interest intermediation system.

While lobbying attempts in most EU policy areas have been investigated, less attention has been paid to the area of EU external relations. However, NSAs are part and parcel of the foreign policy-making process. Not only are they involved in the output side of EU external policy-making, as beneficiaries of EU funding or in implementing EU projects, but they are also present on the input side by contributing to the formulation and shaping of EU external policy. An interesting case study to show the role played by NSAs in EU external policies is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, given its importance on the EU's agenda since the 1970s. NSAs are key players in providing EU officials and policy-makers with information, in raising their awareness, in drawing their attention to events happening on the ground or having a bearing on the relationships between the EU and the parties, and in offering different frames of analysis for issues of EU interest.

The most active NSAs in lobbying and advocacy regarding the issue of the EU's policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are NGOs. In this specific case, they mainly concentrate their activities on human rights (e.g. Adalah, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network – EMHRN), on social and developmental matters (e.g. Aprodev), on the problems associated with the conflict such as house demolition, prisoners, etc. (e.g. Ir Amim), and on Israel and the Jewish people (e.g. European Friends of Israel, NGO Monitor). Unlike NGOs that tend to work on issues that are 'ongoing' (e.g. conflict resolution or human rights and international law-related issues),

business groups focus their lobbying efforts on specific issues at specific times. Examples include the



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case of Brita GmbH concerning the import of goods from the settlements or of Teva with regard to the [Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance](#) of pharmaceutical goods exported from Israel to the EU and vice versa. This is probably the reason why there are fewer examples of business groups lobbying the EU to influence its policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are other possible explanations, e.g. they lobby at the national level or their interests are not affected by EU policies, as their sectors of activity are not regulated by the EU. There are other types of actors active on the issue such as think tanks and solidarity groups, with the latter being especially vocal at the national level.

When analysing the role that NSAs play in EU policy-making towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a key activity is the provision of information. For instance, the work done by the Israeli NGO Peace Now on settlements is very important, as, according to my interviews with EU officials, this NGO has a good understanding of the situation on the ground and offers updated data on Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Similarly, the database [Who Profits?](#), run by the Coalition of Women for Peace, lists all business groups involved in Israeli occupation policies, offering a picture of the involvement of the private sector in the occupied territories. Related to the provision of information, another key role played by NSAs consists of raising the awareness of both the EU and public opinion with regard to specific issues. For example, NGOs such as Mossawa, Adalah, and the EMHRN, draw policy-makers' attention to the situation of the Arab minority in Israel.

NSAs are also involved in framing activities and agenda-setting. An interesting example is the legal frame proposed by the MATTIN Group/Aprodev on the issue of goods produced by Israeli settlements. These two NGOs have focused on the 'territorial scope' of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, which regulates EU-Israeli trade. They argue that, by allowing settlements goods to benefit from preferential treatment, the EU accepts Israeli illegal application of the Agreement to the settlements. As a consequence, the EU violates its own law, as EU institutions and Member States have legal obligations to abide by international law, international humanitarian law, and international human rights, which also implies that the EU should not aid or assist any third party that violates them. This is a different way of framing the problem of settlement goods, as it works on the basis of EU law and its legal commitments.

More research is still needed in the field of EU foreign policy and NSAs, who play a significant role in the formulation and evolution of this policy area. By further exploring the engagement of NSAs with the EU, we can improve our understanding of the EU's foreign policy-making process.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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